



## VICTORIA - VICTORIAN

Beethoven designated the Dona nobis pacem of his Mass in D as a "prayer for inner and outer peace". The deep peace which came to me that June day amid the ruins of my City was essentially an inner one.

But the tranquillity which lapped the first years of my life in London was largely an outer one. It was part and parcel of the extraordinary stability of the Victorian age which (I am almost ashamed to say it) was a little suffocating at the time to the ardently artistic small creature whom it cradled.

Truly, late Victorian England was a remarkable place. Terror had been practically eliminated from the scheme of things; science held a position in the mental world comparable to that of duty in the moral one; freedom was so assured that one might travel almost anywhere in Europe without a passport. Fabulous as it now seems, this was the normal state of affairs.

Victoria -a Victorian; the present tense and the past. The time when the great Queen was the Empire's centre of gravity and the time when people grinned at her mere memory. Now the past tense too has passed into history, and Victoria's greatness is again recognized.

Looking out over the Nazi-ridden world today I am often reminded of the tale of the Victorian lady, who, being taken by her nephew to see a performance of the Agamemnon of Aeschylus remarked at the end "How different from the home life of our w



own dear Queen! " How different indeed! No generation has ever seen such changes as the one to which I belong, nor been called on to adjust themselves to so many different conditions. A hard privilege, but one I would not exchange with anybody.

That London and Queen Victoria were closely linked at one time is sure, and her name remains in Victoria Street, Queen Victoria Street, Victoria Station and the Victoria and Albert Museum to show how she dominated the regard of her people. Everything seemed called after her, including even a particularly succulent triangular "Victoria bun" with white sugar dusted over the shiny top and currants inside. But in her later years she cared little about the capital, spent most of her time at Windsor ( was not her soubriquet "The Widow of Windsor?"), Osborne or Balmoral. London, on its side, went on without her - calmly, for the most part, though occasionally roused by events that made a stir out of all proportion to themselves judged by present standards. I dimly recall the horror caused by the Fenian outrages, and remember hearing my Father and Mother say how one night, my Father sitting late at his papers at Norwood, and my Mother sewing beside him, they heard the distant explosions at (I think) the Houses of Parliament. And I recall another winter evening when a sudden clap of thunder sent a stout-hearted neighbour of ours leaping out of his chair crying, "They've got it", and running up the hill, coatless and hatless, "durch Nacht und Wind" under the belief the Fenians had blown up the Crystal Palace.



"Autre temps, autres moeurs". Many years later, on the night of March 31 - April 1, 1939, I, then living at Porchester Terrace, Hyde Park, heard the explosions of successive I. R. A. bombs in the Strand, Park Lane, and Edgware Road. Angry at being roused, I just rolled over in bed and went to sleep again.

London in the last decades of the nineteenth century was not so beautiful as it became in Edwardian days. Still it was very much itself, and we accepted its defects easily because nothing better existed. For example, the macadamized roads. They were dusty in dry weather, and disgusting in wet; London mud was famous the world over. No wonder ladies and men both wore button or lace-up boots in winter, only of course, the ladies' boots were smarter. My Mother had perfectly fascinating little pairs, made in France, with the glacé kid as soft as a glove, long laces of pure silk and glacé kid bows on the insteps. She used to buy them in Bond Street or at the Army and Navy Stores. Along the muddy roads, at strategic points crossing sweepers plied a useful trade and pedestrians would reward them with pennies. The Sunday penny to the sweeper was almost a ritual. As to the traffic, it was immense. Every sort of horse-drawn vehicle proceeded - or could not proceed - along congested thoroughfares. Private carriages, from barouches and broughams bearing the Royal Arms, to modest little "pill-boxes" - covered drays or open lorries drawn by splendid cart-horses with shaggy manes, shining harness, and great hoofs striking sparks from the flints; small omnibuses



with different colourings distinguishing their lines, ( such as the Royal Blues, or the white buses that went to Victoria, or the greens that went through Long Acre) with their open tops reached by steep ladders, their benches fitted with tarpaulin aprons against rain, and their interiors, stuffy to a degree; then the four-wheeled cabs - the growlers - with their ruminative horses and morose drivers; and the jingling hansoms with their lively horses and witty cabbies perched up behind; and then again all the tradesmen's carts, headed by the butchers peculiarly dashing and precarious little boxes on their high wheels with the butcher lads in blue mounted on them driving like the devil. ( The wooden shoulder trays on which the boys carried in meat to the house-doors excited all dogs to passionate attentions! )

In recent years I have heard people complain of the delays in London traffic and sigh for the good old days - Fiddlesticks! The blocks were as bad or worse, and if horses got restive when standing solidly jammed for twenty or thirty minutes in Piccadilly or Langham Place, there was no predicting the results. Only the grand "horse-sense" of all concerned averted accidents.

The houses looking down on these rivers of traffic were mainly stucco in the West End, very "douce", and wealthy without ostentation. Elsewhere, the brick and stucco were less spruce, and in poor districts the squalor was such as is not to be seen now, thanks be! Public houses were open for most hours of the



twenty-four, and drunken men and women made unlovely sights in the flare of the gas jets which lit shops and streets. The flare of these jets is still a faintly repellent memory to me. So too are the horse-smells of the roads.

Even Buckingham Palace itself was not specially impressive. The old front was simply domestic architecture covering a wide space, and the Sovereign's flag seldom flew from the roof.

It was during the summer of 1887 that Queen Victoria's First Jubilee brought Norwood and ourselves within the fringe of royal London. For weeks beforehand the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany had been staying at the Queen's Hotel, Upper Norwood, it was said for the benefit of his health. They often drove about the neighbourhood in an open barouche and their faces were soon familiar to us - the Crown Prince as typical German of the best type - the Princess dignified, simple, a little stern. Spring was lovely that year; the flowers rioted. As May merged into June the countless May trees, white, pink and red, which thrive on London clay, burst into bouquets of blossom. Our front garden at 28. The Avenue, had a pair particularly famous - great globes of pink, ensphered in their own heady scent. I confess we were proud of them.

Very early on the morning of the Jubilee Day, my Father and Mother set off into London to see the Procession from the window to which they had been invited by friends. Still very early, Gillie our cook, washing the front door steps, became aware of the Crown Prince and Princess driving past in an open carriage



on their way to the ceremony. As she knelt, she saw them turn point to our May trees, speak to each other in evident admiration of such beauty. Thrilled almost to incoherence the dear kind soul rushed into the house to spread the news to my Grandfather, my Aunt and us children jumping about in our beds.

The early sunlight expanded into a day of imperial splendour. How we spent the whole of it I do not quite recall, but during the morning my Aunt and Grandfather took us children to visit some friends at the far end of Harold Road. It was strange to walk along streets absolutely void of people, for virtually everyone had gone to see, or try to see, the Jubilee Procession. Our call passed off happily. By the time returned, however, the sun had mounted to noon. The heat beating down on us was terrific, the pathway sent it up again drenched with dust. My Grandfather and Aunt decoyed us along as best they could. At length my sister, Freda, whose emotional reactions were always vivid, hurled her Leghorn hat into the middle of the road, and declared she would go no farther. There we halted, my Aunt entreating, and my Grandfather (who had been a martinet to his own children) entirely flummoxed, alternately removing his Panama hat, mopping his brow, and saying "Tut, tut, tut". In the end the little brood of chickens was marshalled home, the grown-ups in a state bordering on collapse! Later in the day we helped prepare the illuminations. Every house in the neighbourhood, our own included, flew flags. For the evening we arranged that all our front windows should be lit with rows of candles and fairy glasses



coloured red, yellow and blue containing night-lights. When these receptacles ran short we used some of the best Russian opal glass finger bowls - an act which showed the devotion inspired by the occasion, for though these opal bowls were among my Mother's most treasured possessions, she contributed them gladly. Our chef d'oeuvre was a large oleograph portrait of Queen Victoria (the one in which she stands wearing her crown and blue ribbon of the Garter) and this we placed in the most conspicuous window illuminating it as a kind of transparency. My parents had returned from Town in the afternoon. At night they took me with them to the Crystal Palace to see the fireworks, my Aunt (who never went out in night air) meanwhile remaining on guard with the maids and buckets of water in case of fire. I have no clear recollection of the fire-works, but I do remember the vast crowds in the warm darkness and - I think I am right - the distant beacons leaping into flames on the horizon. We came home to find the anticipated had happened. There had been a fire - happily very small - , which my Aunt had gallantly extinguished with wet towels. Everyone was eager to tell the tale. Finally, very pleased with ourselves and the day, we got to bed, to the sound of distant thousands of feet flocking home. My sisters and I felt we had done Queen Victoria proud.



Between that summer and the Diamond Jubilee of 1897, I only had one distant royal contact. Our near neighbours and dear friends, General Sir Alexander and the Honble. Lady Montgomery Moore were at home after one of his important commands, and she was going to one of Queen Victoria's drawing-rooms. These took place at Buckingham Palace in the afternoon. Lady Montgomery Moore thought it would be interesting for me to see the ladies at the Palace before they entered the Throne Room. How she arranged it I do not know, but on a fine spring afternoon I found myself travelling by train from Gipsy Hill Station to Victoria with Lady Montgomery Moore's maid in attendance. Thence to Buckingham Palace in a four-wheeled cab ( the correct conveyance for a jeune fille) and presently being led through passages to a very large room where we were told we might stand by the door and watch. At first the room was empty. Reviewing it in memory I see again a long row of windows on the left, white walls, and a crimson velvet pile carpet that stretched on and on to the far end. The spring sunshine gave brilliance to this setting, which in turn threw up into jewel-like radiance the ladies who presently began to enter. On they came, till the room was one mass of sweeping trains, flashing gems, and tossing feathers surmounting their veils. The debutantes were in white, the married women in all the colours of the rainbow, the dowagers in rich velvets and still rarer lace ( Lady Montgomery Moore had purple velvet and Venice point ). It was wonderful to see all this and not have the enchantment damaged by daylight. If the ladies had made up their faces, they had done



it to match nature as nearly as possible. High-bred faces they were and I recall one of outstanding beauty. As they put the final touches to their feathers and frocks I divined a flutter, a nervousness among them I never fully understood until I saw Queen Victoria myself for the first time some years later.

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The Diamond Jubilee of 1897 does not bring so many memories. This time the Queen's Hotel at Upper Norwood housed a number of Indian Princes and their suites. They too drove about in open carriages drawn by fine pairs of horses, and imparted a bizarre splendour to our loval roads. On the morning of the great day some of them passed our house enroute to London. I have never seen such a concentration of jewels as blazed on the persons of these dark, impassively handsome men. Their costumes were of brightest coloured satins - not colours quite as we make ~~to~~ them but the strange, shadowless tints of the East, taking the sunlight only less vehemently than the jewels with which they were sewn. A potentate whose name I never knew wore an amazing pink satin coat. A still more staggering suit of green satin encrusted with diamonds was worn, I think, by the Gaekwar of Baroda. Until one has seen massed diamonds under a morning sun one has no conception of their magnificence - nor of their superb incongruity on a suburban road ! But then a part of the fascination of London lies in its capacity to attract and absorb elements from the whole world without losing its individuality.



Though this second Jubilee had been an even greater triumph than the first many people, I think, felt in it a premonition of sunset. When, somewhere about this period I had a distant view of Queen Victoria, driving along Kensington High Road, she already looked rather weary. Later I saw her again on what must have been almost her last public progress through London. It was that gray March day of which Dame Ethel Smyth writes so vividly in her book "What happened next". I, by that time a student at the Royal College of Music, was also determined to see my Queen. Out I went into Exhibition Road and secured a front place on the kerb opposite and across the way from the garden of Lowther Lodge - now covered by a block of flats. There I stood for perhaps an hour, the crowd only three or four deep behind me; all rather cold in person though a-glow with loyalty. At last, showing as little pomp as any Sovereign on progress can ever have had, came the open landau, and for an instant I gazed close at the Majesty of England. A little old lady, all in black, wearing a simple black bonnet. That homely-sounding figure has often been described. But the ineffable dignity of her bearing, the extraordinary concentration in her look of the supreme powers of a great leader, and her complete confidence in the people of London, as she acknowledged their acclamations, could never be adequately described by anyone. Her personality made so great an impact on me that I experience the force of it to this day.

London. Usually we had our things made for us, but today we



Only Britain could have produced just such a Queen-Empress;  
only a Victoria have directed Britain to such pre-eminence.  
I bow my knee to her memory.....

During the dark days of the South African War we knew that she suffered as much in spirit as any of her subjects. Presently though the worst of the War was past, we learned that her strength was ebbing. There came a day in January 1901 - I think it was a Tuesday - when we knew there was no hope. It was cold and sunless weather. At about 4.30 that afternoon I came out of the Royal College of Music to start for home. Before me was a view I knew well - the Royal Albert Hall, huge and ugly, and the bare trees of Kensington Gardens. But today it all seemed uncanny. The steps were livid stone, the Hall crouched dully monstrous, the gray heavens, shot with the ochre glare of fog, seemed to shift and mix and change behind all like some gigantic back-cloth. Wrought-up, rooted to the spot, I said to myself "I am seeing the end of an era".

All that evening England kept vigil. Next morning nothing remained except to lament the Queen. My Father said she had been the Mother of her country, and he wished us to go into mourning. He gave money to purchase black for our servants, and gathering them together, my Mother addressed them, explaining the greatness of Queen Victoria and what her loss meant to the Empire. Then my Mother, taking me with her, set off into London. Usually we had our things made for us, but today we



hastened to the Army and Navy Stores. Already most people were wearing black, and by the end of the week all London was sabled. It was early when we got to the Stores and they had not long been open, but the dress departments were heaving with people. Anywhere and everywhere women were trying on garments and assistants were scuttling round faster than the proverbial rabbits. Into the throng we dived and somehow seized garments that fitted us - not very nice, but passable. Mine was a short coat and skirt in Melton cloth. It proved cold, I remember, for winter wear. Probably it had cotton in it, for it was a harsh fabric, very unlike the lovely woollen materials we usually purchased.

The weather was still sullen and dark as we walked to Victoria Station. The station was half deserted. Our suburban train was waiting at a platform. We sat in it, but the train did not start. Looking idly across some vacant platforms I suddenly saw a train of saloon coaches sliding in, the coal on the engine's tender covered with whitewash. A Royal train! It drew to a standstill. A small group of officials gathered near the door of the central coach opposite us. The door opened, all hats were doffed. Out of the doorway stepped King Edward VII - his first entry into London as King of England. Upon him was a supreme dignity. In one night the agreeable, rather casual Prince had become the calm, wise ruler of the world's greatest Empire. Sorrow and responsibility had moulded his face to nobility, his mien was that of a man set apart and above from his fellows for the performance of a consummate duty. ...The Majesty of England! A new era had begun.